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ABSTRACT

Although school districts are critical to the operation of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) Program, relatively little is known about how they plan, implement, and evaluate their SDFSCA-funded prevention activities. The U.S. Department of Education initiated this study to provide a more complete description of the ways in which districts accomplish these tasks, and to provide a baseline for gauging progress on district implementation of new guidelines for the SDFSCA program. Information is used from 520 districts nationwide surveyed by telephone. Results show that many districts experienced problems developing measurable goals and objectives. Prevention activities typically target students directly rather than classroom or school environments. Only a small proportion of prevention activities implemented are research-based. For many districts, funding amounts per pupil from either SDFSCA or other sources are modest. Although school districts typically collect information on problem behavior in schools and use the information in many ways, the quality of that information may limit its usefulness. Despite concerns about how student surveys are conducted, districts do realize the importance of using information on problem behavior in program planning. Eighty-nine percent of districts use evaluation information to adopt new prevention activities. (RT)

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Progress in Prevention

Report on the National Study of Local Education Agency Activities under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act

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Progress in Prevention

Report on the National Study of Local Education Agency Activities under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act

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Planning and Education Service

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Executive Summary

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) Program receives more funding and reaches more schools than any other school-based drug and violence prevention program nationally. Although local education agencies (school districts) are critical to the operation of this program, relatively little is known about how they plan, implement, and evaluate their SDFSCA-funded prevention activities. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) initiated this study to provide a more complete description of the ways in which districts nationally accomplish such tasks; the study also is intended to provide a baseline for gauging progress on district implementation of new guidelines for the SDFSCA program, referred to as the "Principles of Effectiveness," which became effective in July 1998.

The report is based on a telephone survey of a national probability sample of school districts. The sample consisted of 600 districts that we selected after stratifying the pool of districts by district characteristics such as student enrollment and urbanicity. We collected information in a computer-assisted telephone interview with the staff person in each district who was most knowledgeable about the local SDFSCA program. Although the interviews occurred between December 1998 and April 1999, the reference period for the study was the 1997-98 school year. The survey collected information from 520 districts; with 23 districts ineligible for the survey, it achieved an overall response rate of 90 percent.

Many districts experienced problems developing measurable goals and objectives. In selecting prevention activities to meet their goals and objectives, the majority of districts considered information on the effectiveness of specific activities. However, the extent to which their understanding of program effectiveness corresponds with ED's nonregulatory guidance for implementing the Principles of Effectiveness, is questionable.

- Approximately half of districts adopted a measurable outcome objective. Fewer than half adopted a measurable process objective.
- In selecting prevention activities, 58 percent of districts considered research on the effectiveness of those activities. Only 35 percent of districts defined research-based prevention in a way that is as rigorous as the definition provided in ED's nonregulatory guidance.
- Forty-nine percent of districts reported that they needed more technical assistance on identifying program effectiveness research.

The district staff who coordinate prevention activities often have many responsibilities. Those prevention activities typically target students directly rather than classroom or school environments. Only a small proportion of the prevention activities implemented are research-based.

- Approximately 70 percent of district SDFSCA coordinators spend no more than 20 percent of their time on prevention activities.
- Eighty-nine percent of districts implement prevention instruction. This type of activity and other activities that are geared to individual students are much more frequently used by districts than activities focusing on the classroom and school environment, such as reviewing and revising discipline practices.

- Although more than half of districts considered research on the effectiveness of activities when activities are selected, only 9 percent of districts are implementing research-based drug prevention activities. A larger proportion of districts use activities that include research-based elements. The findings are similar for violence prevention activities.

The majority of districts receive funding for prevention activities from other sources in addition to the SDFSCA program. For many districts, the amount of funding per pupil from either SDFSCA or other sources is modest. Nonetheless, district prevention programming relies heavily on SDFSCA funding.

- Two-thirds of districts receive funding for prevention from sources other than SDFSCA. The most common sources are states, and school districts or local governments.
- Sixty percent of the districts without supplemental SDFSCA "greatest needs" funding (received by 9% of districts) receive under $6 per pupil in SDFSCA funding.
- Districts were most likely to allocate SDFSCA and non-SDFSCA prevention funds to the purchase of program materials and implementation.
- Forty-six percent of districts would likely lose their prevention programs without SDFSCA funding. More than three-fourths of districts would need to reduce their prevention activities to a great extent if they lost this funding.

Districts typically collected information on problem behavior in schools and use the information in many ways. However, the quality of that information may limit its usefulness.

- Practically all districts require schools to report to them on serious incidents of problem behavior, such as student possession of weapons. Many districts place little emphasis on ensuring the quality of the incident information.
- Many districts also conducted surveys of students on drug use or victimization in schools; for example, 61 percent surveyed high school students. However, a sizeable proportion of these districts used unscientific methods to select students for the surveys, limiting the extent to which districts should generalize their survey results.
- Although we have concerns about how districts conduct student surveys and we do not know how systematically information is collected from other sources (e.g., school administrators, teachers, police, and community representatives), we are encouraged to see that districts realize the importance of using information on problem behavior in program planning. Eighty-nine percent of districts use evaluation information to adopt new prevention activities and 87 percent use the information to modify existing activities.

1. Introduction

The federally funded Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) Program is the Nation's largest school-based program for promoting school safety and preventing substance abuse by youth. Although local education agencies (LEAs) (school districts) play a pivotal role in the program, many questions surround how they plan and implement program activities. This report will answer some of those questions.

1.1 Background

The SDFSCA Program provides funding to states to support drug and violence prevention programs. Each state has both a State and Local Grants Program and a Governors' Program. The state education agencies (SEAs) allocate 70 percent of funds to school districts by formula (based on relative student enrollment); the remaining 30 percent of funds are awarded to districts that have the "greatest needs" for additional funds to implement prevention programs. The Governors' Programs award grants to community agencies and public and private nonprofit entities. The districts and other grantees support prevention activities at the school and community levels. Providing $531 million in state grants for the 1997-98 school year and reaching 97 percent of school districts, this program is the largest and broadest school-based drug and violence prevention program nationally.

This study provides a valuable baseline for assessing the progress of districts in complying with the Principles of Effectiveness.

Because the SDFSCA Program operates at the state, school district, and school levels, understanding of this program requires study at each level. Researchers have recently completed or have underway studies at the state and local levels. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has sponsored studies at the school level about different aspects of the programs funded under the SDFSCA, including the **Study on School Violence and Prevention.** However, very few studies have examined the SDFSCA Program at the district level; none of these other studies has collected information on a national probability sample of districts.

The National Study of Local Education Agency Activities under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act was intended to fill the information gap at the district level, by describing how districts nationwide plan, implement, and evaluate their SDFSCA programs and prevention programs funded by other sources. This study also can yield a valuable baseline for assessing the progress of districts in complying with recently developed program standards. The standards, which are called the "Principles of Effectiveness," specify the processes that all SDFSCA-funded programs have been expected to follow since July 1998. In addition, this study can provide information for focusing technical assistance efforts, for example, to increase district compliance with the Principles.

1.2 Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

The National Study of Local Education Activities under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Program sought to answer a variety of research questions. See Exhibit 1-1. These research questions cover four main items (a) planning and program development, including needs assessment and activities to gather and use information about effective practices; (b) program implementation, including types of activities underway in school districts and the extent to which these efforts are implemented in adequate and effective ways; (c) resources, including sources of funding and cost of efforts; and (d) evaluation and reporting methods.

To guide us in answering these questions, we developed a conceptual framework that illustrates how community characteristics and other factors influence district SDFSCA-related activities, and how these district activities influence student behavior and prevention activities. See Figure 1-1. The framework consists of three main sets of components: inputs to districts, district activities, and school activities and outcomes. In addition, the framework identifies "feedback loops" or flows of information on implementation and outcomes.

In addition to the research questions and conceptual framework, the study design was driven by the Principles of Effectiveness. Responding to concerns about the effectiveness and accountability of the programs being implemented with SDFSCA funds, ED developed the Principles of Effectiveness. These principles mandate that state education agencies and school districts do the following for their SDFSCA-funded prevention efforts (a) conduct needs assessments, (b) develop measurable goals and objectives, (c) use prevention efforts that have been demonstrated to be effective, and (d) evaluate program activities. Although the Principles became effective after the reference period for the study (the 1997-98 school year), we collected information on activities prescribed by the Principles to provide a baseline against which ED can gauge how well districts are implementing the Principles.

Exhibit 1-1. Research questions

Planning and program development

1. What types of planning processes do districts use in designing their drug and violence prevention programs? How do they gather information about effective practices, and to what extent do they use this information in planning programs?
2. What types of needs assessments do districts conduct, and how do they use them for planning their drug and violence prevention programs?
3. To what extent do districts use research-based prevention approaches? What are the barriers that prevent districts from using more research-based approaches?
4. What kinds of technical assistance do districts receive in planning and evaluating their programs, and what are their needs for technical assistance?
5. How do districts involve parents and community groups, including law enforcement agencies, in prevention programming?

Implementation

6. What specific types of activities are underway in districts nationally to prevent student drug use and violence, and to ensure school safety?
7. To what extent do districts establish prevention programming centrally as opposed to allowing schools to design their own programs? What efforts do districts make to ensure that centrally-planned programming is carried out consistently? To what extent does programming vary within districts?
8. How intense are district programs, in terms of contact hours and duration? To what extent does program intensity vary across schools?
9. To what extent do districts implement their prevention programs in adequate and effective ways (e.g., provide sufficient training to teachers and staff)? If districts are using particular prevention models (e.g., based on research), to what extent do they implement programs that are faithful to the models?

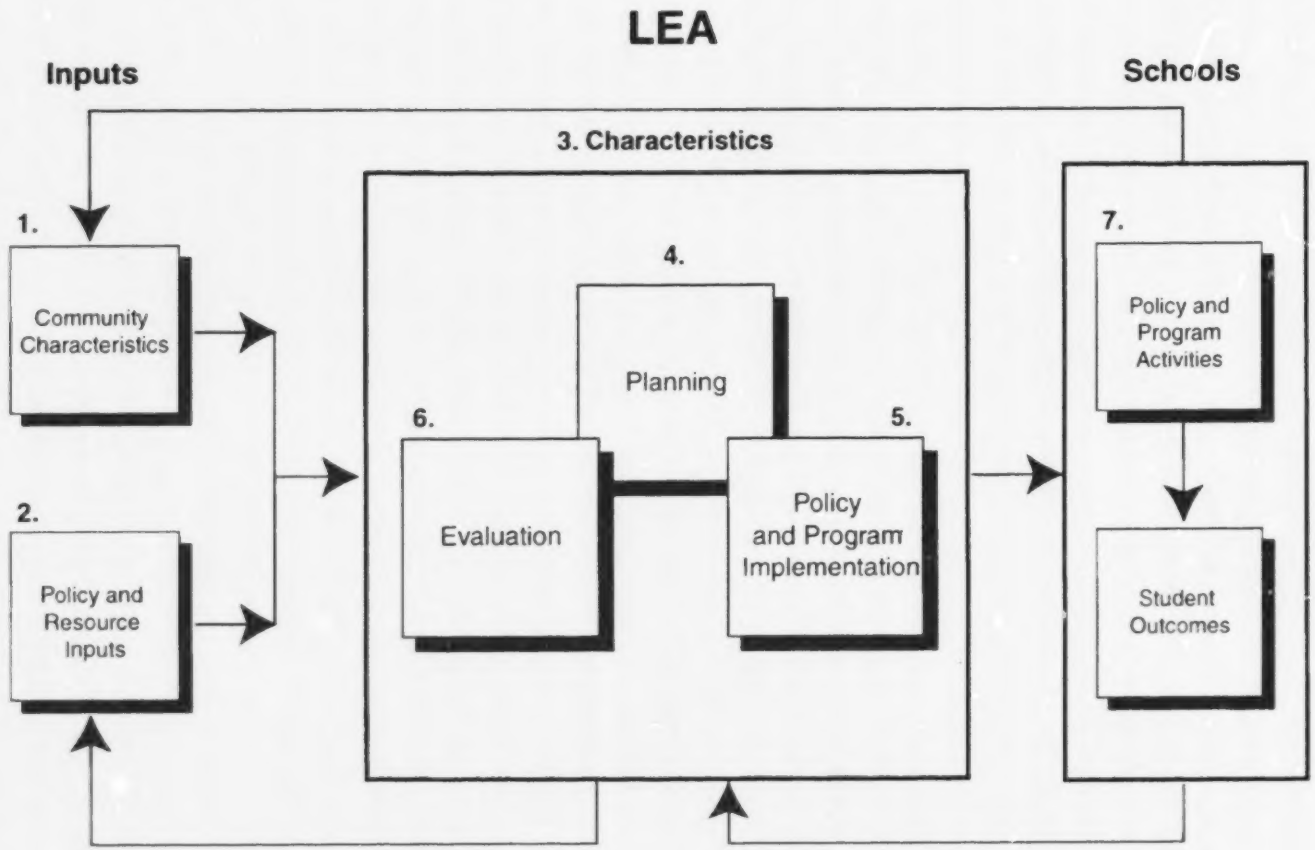
Resources

10. What sources of funding (including SDFSCA, other federal sources, state and local government funds, and private funds) do districts use to support their drug and violence prevention efforts? What are typical funding levels, including non-SDFSCA sources?
11. How much do particular prevention activities or types of activities cost? How much does program administration at the district level cost?
12. What factors influence district decisions about how to allocate their SDFSCA funds to schools and projects? What types of allocations do they make? Do districts target their funds?

Evaluation and reporting

13. What methods do districts use to monitor, record, and report their incidence of drug use and violence?
14. What methods do districts use to evaluate the success of their drug and violence prevention efforts? How do they use evaluation results to modify, improve, or plan their prevention programming?

Figure 1-1. Conceptual Framework



1.3 Methods

The National Study of Local Education Agency Activities under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act collected information from a cross-section of school districts in the 50 states. From the pool of the more than 13,000 school districts that enroll students (as opposed to districts that are "supervisory" or solely administrative), we sampled 600 districts. We based the sample on district characteristics that are relevant to addressing the research questions. The data collection entailed computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) of district officials. In addition, for a small subset of the districts, we collected and analyzed district goals and objectives for their SDFSCA program.

Sample Selection. We drew the sample of 600 school districts from the Common Core of Data (CCD), which is prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). We used the 1995-96 version of the file, the most recent information at the time of sample selection. The CCD includes information on more than 16,000 public school districts, of which only 13,304 enroll students. The sampling process involved stratifying, or sorting, the CCD by six variables that are correlated with how data is presented in this report. These variables are as follows (a) urbanicity, (b) type of district, (c) district size, (d) poverty, (e) percent of minority students enrolled district, and (f) census region.

In conjunction with sampling based on the stratification variables, we "oversampled" the largest school districts, and districts receiving greatest needs funding from the SDFSCA Program. We selected all of the Nation's school districts with enrollment of 90,000 or more. These 26 districts account for only 0.2 percent of the Nation's school districts but enroll almost 12 percent of the Nation's children. We categorize district size as follows: very small districts enroll fewer than 300 students, small districts enroll 300 to 1,000 students, moderate-sized school districts enroll 1,001 to 2,500 students, medium-sized school districts enroll from 2,501 to 10,000 students, large school districts enroll from 10,001 to 89,999 students, and very large school districts enroll 90,000 or more students. Using probability sampling methods, we also drew a subsample of 43 districts from among the districts selected for the main sample; we included respondents from this subsample in an in-depth analysis of SDFSCA goals and objectives.

Data Collection. Before telephoning district SDFSCA coordinators to conduct interviews, we mailed a paper copy of the questionnaire to the sampled respondents. See Appendix. At the same time as the mailing to district SDFSCA coordinators, we notified district superintendents about the selection of their district for the study.

Experienced telephone interviewers collected the information, after participating in 3 days of training on the study's objectives, questionnaire, and procedures. To maximize data quality, we used a CATI approach to collect the data presented in this report. Data collection extended from December 1998 through April 1999. (The reference period for the study was the 1997-98 school year.) The survey collected information from 520 districts, achieving an overall response rate of 90 percent. We collected copies of SDFSCA goals and objectives from 30 of the 36 districts that were in the subsample and responded in the main survey.

A number of very small districts were initially unwilling to participate, because they felt that their small program allocations prohibited them from implementing all the aspects of the program covered by the survey. In order to collect at least some information, we asked them to report on 15 of the critical survey questions.

The reader should note that the information presented is based on valid responses only. These responses include responses from respondents for whom given questions applied; they exclude "don't know" responses and nonresponses to applicable questions.

1.4 Report Organization

This report is organized around the four main topics covered by the research questions. The chapters are as follows.

- Chapter 2 addresses planning and program development, including the process of assessing needs and gathering and weighing of information on prospective programs, and role of stakeholders in planning.
- Chapter 3 covers program implementation including types of prevention activities, centralization of program planning, targeting of activities to specific types of students, program intensity, duration, and effectiveness.
- Chapter 4 describes program resources including funding sources and levels, costs of specific program activities, and allocation of resources to program activities and schools.
- Chapter 5 discusses evaluation and reporting including methods for monitoring and reporting drug use and violence, methods for evaluating prevention activities, and how evaluation results are used.
- Chapter 6 assesses district implementation of the Principles of Effectiveness.

We present detailed tables of findings in a separate volume of this report, which we refer to as Volume 2.

Although the focus of this report is on activities under the SDFSCA, we also present findings on prevention activities funded by other sources.

2. Planning and Program Development

Well-planned prevention programs unite district needs for prevention with goals and objectives for preventing and reducing problem behavior (i.e., alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, and other problem behavior) and effective prevention efforts. Many districts fall short on one or more of these ingredients. Developing adequate goals and objectives is an issue for a large proportion of districts. In selecting prevention efforts aimed at meeting goals and objectives, many districts also tended to exclude needs assessments and research on effective practices from the decision-making process. These districts typically relied more on internal factors and sources than on external ones. Districts often did consider the effectiveness of particular prevention efforts, but the ways in which the districts viewed evidence on program effectiveness raise questions about how they define program effectiveness. (For this analysis, we use the definition of program effectiveness provided in the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) nonregulatory guidance for implementing the Principles of Effectiveness. Evaluation researchers and others may use even more rigorous definitions than the one provided in the nonregulatory guidance. However, at a minimum, the definition in the guidance is the one districts should apply when assessing program effectiveness.)

2.1 Goals and Objectives for Prevention

A large proportion of districts lacked measurable goals and objectives. Overall, districts included key stakeholders in the development of prevention goals and objectives.

Measurable goals and objectives—main sample. Program objectives are important for achieving consensus and organizing program activities. Program evaluation literature stresses that the most useful goals and objectives are ones that are measurable. Ideally, outcome objectives should specify the amount and direction of change expected and the timeframe in which it would occur. Process or operational objectives should state the amount and type of service units delivered or the number of persons served, within a specified time frame.

Approximately half of districts adopted at least one outcome objective that indicated the amount of change expected. Fifty-two percent specified the extent to which the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs would be reduced; 48 percent indicated the extent to which acts of violence in school would be reduced. See Table 2-1. Some 27 percent of districts also included an objective that specified the extent to which the bringing of weapons to schools would be reduced.

Approximately half of districts adopted at least one outcome objective that indicated the extent to which drug abuse and/or violence would be reduced.

Types of outcome objectives varied considerably by district enrollment. Districts with larger enrollments were more likely to adopt outcome objectives that specified the types of changes expected. For example, 75 percent of districts with enrollments greater than or equal to 90,000 adopted an objective that specified the extent to which the abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs would be reduced, as compared with only 44 percent of districts with enrollments of less than 300. We found similar, though smaller, variation on the other types of outcome objectives among districts with different enrollments.

Table 2-1. Percent of districts reporting specific objectives for prevention activities

Objective	Percent
Minimum number of hours of drug prevention education for students	25
Minimum number of hours of violence prevention education for students	19
Amount of reduction in student abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs	52
Amount of reduction in acts of violence in schools	48
Amount of reduction in weapons in schools	27
Number of hours that parents and community members involved in prevention activities at schools	16
Other[1]	20

NOTE: Results are based on responses to multiple survey questions. Between 410 and 411 districts provided responses to a given question.

1 Other objectives include increasing attendance, promoting smoking cessation, and providing specific activities (e.g., peer mediation).

Smaller proportions of districts adopted measurable process objectives than adopted measurable outcome objectives. Twenty-five percent of districts specified a minimum number of hours of drug prevention education that students would receive. Relatively few districts adopted objectives that specified the minimum number of hours of violence prevention education that students would receive (19%) or the minimum number of hours that parents and community members would be involved in prevention activities (16%).

Fewer districts adopted measurable process objectives than adopted measurable outcome objectives.

Again, districts with larger enrollments generally were more likely to adopt measurable process objectives than districts with smaller enrollments. Compared to the outcome objectives, however, we observed less variation on these types of objectives among districts. See Table 2.1.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on district goals and objectives.

Measurable goals and objectives—subsample. In addition to the survey information that we gathered, we collected and analyzed written copies of SDFSCA goals and objectives for a subsample of 30 districts. The purposes of this analysis were twofold: to examine and describe in greater detail district goals and objectives and to reduce the bias and error that may be present in district self-reports on goals and objectives. Using probability sampling methods, we drew a subsample of 43 districts from among the districts selected for the main sample. Of these 43 districts, 36 responded in the main survey; of the 36 districts that responded, 30 complied with our request to provide written copies of their SDFSCA goals and objectives. We content analyzed the SDFSCA goals and objectives from these 30 districts. The number of subsample respondents limits the extent to which we can accurately generalize to districts nationally. Hence, the analysis of this subsample yields results that are more preliminary than conclusive.

The in-depth analysis of goals and objectives for the subsample of districts suggests that an even smaller proportion of districts may be developing measurable goals and objectives than that found for the main sample of districts. Although 53 percent of the subsample districts set reduced student drug abuse as an objective, 23 percent of the subsample districts have an objective that specified both the extent to which student drug abuse will be reduced and the time frame in which the reduction would occur. See Table 2-2.

Table 2-2. Percent of districts in subsample with specific characteristics of SDFSCA objectives

Type and characteristic of objective	Percent
Implementation	
Drug prevention	
Students will receive drug prevention education	83
Amount of drug prevention education	7
Amount of drug prevention education by instructional level	7
Drug prevention education curriculum that will be used	57
Violence prevention	
Students will receive violence prevention education	67
Amount of violence prevention education	3
Amount of violence prevention education by instructional level	3
Violence prevention education curriculum that will be used	37
Staffing training	
Teachers and/or other staff will receive delinquency prevention training	43
Amount of delinquency prevention training	3
Delinquency prevention curriculum/type of training that will be received	17
Parent/community involvement in prevention at school	
Parents/community members will be involved in prevention activities	47
Amount of time that parents/community members will devote to prevention activities	3
Number of parents/community members involved in prevention activities	0
Types of prevention activities that parents/community members will be involved in	27
School safety/security	
Implementation of safety measures (e.g., hall monitoring)	0
Safety measures will be implemented	0
Describe how safety measures will be staffed	0
Implementation of security devices	0
Improvements to school buildings and grounds to promote a safe environment	0
Drug Prevention	
Student drug abuse will be reduced	53
Extent to which student drug abuse will be reduced	27
Timeframe in which reduction in student drug abuse will take place	23
Define student drug violations	3
Violence prevention	
Acts of violence in schools will be reduced	47
Extent to which acts of violence in schools will be reduced	17
Timeframe in which reduction in acts of violence in schools will take place	20
School safety/security	
Define student safety violations	3
Acts of bringing weapons to schools will be reduced	3
Extent to which bringing weapons will be reduced	3
Timeframe in which reduction in bringing weapon to schools will take place	3
Define weapons violations	0
Increase in school safety	13
Define increase in school safety	10
Evaluation	
Student problem behavior will be assessed to gauge need for specific prevention activities	30
How problem behavior will be assessed	33
Program implementation will be evaluated	30
Efforts to reduce student problem behavior will be evaluated	47
How efforts to reduce student problem behavior will be evaluated	43

NOTE: The subsample consisted of a probability sample of 43 districts from among the districts selected for the main sample. Results are based on responses from 30 of the districts in the subsample. The term "drug" refers to alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Seventeen percent of the subsample districts have an objective that specified both the extent to which the frequency of violent incidents will be reduced and the time frame in which the reduction would occur, though 47 percent of the subsample districts included such reductions in a general objective. Only 3 percent of subsample districts have an objective that specified both the extent to which the frequency of bringing weapons to school will be reduced and the time frame in which the reduction would occur.

With regard to process objectives, 14 percent of the subsample districts have goals or objectives specifying the amount of drug prevention education that students will receive, though 57 percent of the districts have an objective that specifies the drug prevention curriculum that will be used. Only 3 percent have an objective specifying the amount of violence prevention education that students will receive; again, a much higher percent of the districts (37%) have an objective that specifies the violence prevention curriculum that will be used. Virtually none of the subsample districts has objectives that cover safety or security measures.

A substantial minority of the subsample districts (47%) has an objective specifying that parents and other community members will be involved in school prevention activities. More than a quarter of the subsample districts (27%) also specified the types of prevention activities in which they will participate. However, only 3 percent of the subsample districts have an objective that specifies the amount of time that parents and other community members will participate, and none of the subsample districts set as an objective the number of such participants.

At least 47 percent of the subsample districts included an objective regarding evaluation. The most common objective on evaluation specified that efforts to reduce student problem behavior will be evaluated. A substantial minority of the subsample districts (43%) indicated how the efforts would be evaluated. Up to a third of the subsample districts have an objective that specified that a needs assessment focusing on student problem behavior will be conducted.

Individuals participating in developing goals and objectives. The nonregulatory guidance for implementing the Principles of Effectiveness directs districts to use goals and objectives to shape prevention programming with the assistance of a local or regional advisory council. Broad participation can help to ensure that goals and objectives reflect community, as well as school, needs for prevention.

A large proportion of districts included key stakeholders in the process of developing prevention goals and objectives. The stakeholders that districts most frequently involved in this process include school administrators (93%), district staff (89%), parents or other community members (84%), other school staff (80%), and members of local district SDFSCA advisory councils (78%).

A large proportion of districts included key stakeholders in the process of developing prevention goals and objectives.

In developing goals and objectives, districts were least likely to involve staff from a regional technical assistance center (20%) and evaluators or researchers (21%). See Tables 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on the participation of specific groups.

2.2 Program Selection

Districts relied on internal sources and factors for selecting prevention efforts more often than on external sources and factors. A large proportion of districts failed to consider needs assessments or research on effective practices in making selection decisions.

Factors considered in selecting and developing programming. In selecting prevention efforts, districts tended to rely much more on sources or factors from within the district than from external sources and factors. More districts (97%) based their decisions on their past experience than on any other single factor. In addition, large proportions of districts indicated that they considered the amount of available funds (88%), maintenance and expansion of successful programs already in place (86%), input from district schools (85%), evaluation of ongoing efforts (85%), and input from an advisory council (81%). The Principles of Effectiveness direct districts to use needs assessments in selecting programs; nearly three-fourths (73%) of districts reported doing so.

In selecting prevention efforts, districts tended to rely much more on sources or factors from within the district than from external sources and factors.

In making decisions on which prevention efforts to support, many districts appear to have taken little advantage of resources from outside their districts. Districts were least likely to mention external sources and factors, such as guidance from local comprehensive regional technical assistance centers (27%) and input from evaluators or researchers at colleges, universities, or private research firms (21%).

The Principles of Effectiveness direct districts to use needs assessments in selecting programs, nearly three-fourths (73%) of districts reported doing so.

More than half of the districts (58%) considered research on the effectiveness of potential programs.

More than half of the districts (58%) considered research on the effectiveness of potential programs. See Table 2.2.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on district decisions.

Characteristics of programming considered in selecting and developing programming. The characteristics of the programming itself that were considered by districts in selecting or developing programming include age appropriateness (99%); relevance of proposed program to specific student alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use problems in the district (95%); evidence of program effectiveness (93%); cost (92%); and ease of implementation (88%). Districts were less likely to mention, as factors in their programming selection or development, cultural appropriateness (78%), whether or not a program needs to be implemented over multiple years to be effective (75%), ease of evaluation (75%), whether or not target schools have the capacity to implement programs effectively (74%), experiences of staff with other activities (73%), and number of sessions (65%). At least some of these factors (e.g., whether target schools have the capacity to implement programs effectively) suggest that a sizable proportion of districts

may adopt programming without considering features that could bear on the successful implementation of the program. See Table 2.2.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on district selection and development of programming.

The finding (reported on page 13) that 93 percent of districts reported considering evidence of program effectiveness in selecting or developing prevention programming seems to clash with the finding (reported on page 13) that only 58 percent of districts consider research on the effectiveness of potential programs in their planning. The apparent inconsistency may be due, in part, to differences between considering research as part of overall decisionmaking on programs and considering research for selecting or developing specific programs. We would expect the latter situation to be more frequent (which it is), because it is more focused and tied more closely to district conditions and circumstances (e.g., availability of funds). Events also may occur during this focused selection process that improve access to research—for example, if a publisher provides information on the "effectiveness" (e.g., testimonials) of a given program as part of a solicitation to purchase the program. See Table 2.2.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on district use of information for selecting programs.

Barriers to the use of information on effective practices. More than any other factor, districts (76%) reported that satisfaction with the programs already in place in the district may have deterred them from reviewing evaluation research on prevention programs. See Table 2.3. Resource limitations also greatly affected district reviews of evaluation research on prevention programs being considered for future implementation. See Table 2.2.4 in Volume 2 for additional information on barriers to using research-based approaches.

Table 2-3. Percent of districts reporting factors that influenced their evaluation of research-based programs

Factor	Percent
Lack of experience in identifying research-based programs	35
Lack of resources to investigate research-based programs	59
Lack of knowledge on how to learn about research-based programs	29
Satisfaction with programs already in place in schools	76
District's inability to match research conditions	27
Lack of consistent research findings on potential programs	29
Lack of research addressing local priorities	30
Other[1]	13

NOTE: Results are based on responses to multiple survey questions. Between 405 and 411 districts provided responses to a given question.

1. Other factors include district politics, problems with conducting needs assessments, and lack of direction from the state.

2.3 Information Gathering on Effective Practices

A sizable proportion of districts relied on research information to learn about potential programs. However, only a minority of districts define research-based programs in a way that is consistent with the Principles of Effectiveness.

Review of research. The Principles of Effectiveness place great emphasis on the use of research-based prevention efforts. Hence, we are interested in how districts obtained access to research and other information on prevention options.

A large proportion of districts consulted the research literature themselves or relied on experts outside their districts who are presumably familiar with the literature. Seventy percent of districts directly reviewed research literature on potential programs, 71 percent of the districts reviewed an evaluation of a proposed program, and 63 percent read professional journals about the effectiveness of potential programs. A smaller proportion of districts discussed potential programs with state SDFSCA staff (45%) or with staff from a local comprehensive regional technical assistance center (30%), or accessed information on proposed programs on the Internet (28%). These latter three sources of information potentially could have provided information on research-based programs. Additionally, a sizable proportion of districts gained information about potential programs through discussions with other district staff, school staff, or members of the local district SDFSCA advisory council (81%); or through talking with individuals identified as satisfied customers of the proposed program (65%). See Table 2.3.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on district use of various sources of information.

> A large proportion of districts consulted the research literature themselves or relied on experts outside their districts to gather information on effective practices.

One clear difference among districts is that large and very large districts and urban districts are far more likely than other districts to review an evaluation of a proposed program or to read professional journals.

District definition of "research-based." Districts use different definitions of "research-based programs" than the one provided in the ED nonregulatory guidance on the implementation of the Principles of Effectiveness. That guidance refers to a research-based program as one that, based on evidence from research or evaluation, prevents or reduces drug use, violence, or disruptive behavior among youth or demonstrates changes in attitudes that are predictors of or precursors to drug use or violent behavior. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, we believe that districts should define researched-based at least this rigorously. However, only 35 percent of districts provided the definition that is most consistent with the Principles of Effectiveness: programs that prevention researchers have demonstrated to be effective in controlled evaluations. Twenty-four percent of districts defined research-based programs as programs that have been recommended as effective by colleagues; 23 percent defined research-

> Only 35 percent of districts defined "research-based" in a manner that is consistent with the Principles of Effectiveness.

based programs as those that have been evaluated by prevention researchers. Given the emphasis placed on research on effective practices by the Principles of Effectiveness, this finding suggests that many districts need better information on the definition of research-based practices and on whether or not prospective efforts are indeed research-based. See Table 2.3.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on district definitions of research-based.

2.4 External Influences on Planning Prevention Programs

As indicated in the conceptual framework (Section 1.2), the planning of district prevention programs can be affected by a variety of factors, including technical assistance and state education agencies (SEAs). Planning activities also may be influenced by district awareness of Federal program guidelines.

Technical assistance. The finding that only 58 percent of districts consider research on the effectiveness of potential programs suggests that districts need help in selecting research-based efforts. (This finding also may indicate that some districts place relatively low value on research-based information—either because they recognize that much of the "research" is weak or inconclusive, or they operate under a different value system. Such districts might receive little or no benefit from technical assistance in selecting research-based efforts.) Only 41 percent of districts received technical assistance on identifying program effectiveness research. In response to a separate question, 49 percent reported that they needed technical assistance in this area. Similar proportions of districts received technical assistance in evaluating potential programs (39%) and reported needing technical assistance in this area (45%). See Table 2.4.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on the amount of technical assistance received and needed.

Only 41 percent of districts received technical assistance on identifying program effectiveness research.

SEA influence on district drug and violence prevention programs. More than half of districts indicated that their SEA influenced one or more aspects of their SDFSCA program. The most frequently reported aspects were reporting (62%), record keeping (59%), program evaluation (58%), and planning (54%). One-third of the districts reported that SEAs influenced their choice of programs or purchases of materials. See Table 2.4.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on SEA influence.

The SDFSCA grant applications that SEAs require from districts are potentially an important tool for shaping district prevention activities. While a sizable proportion of districts reported that SEAs influenced their SDFSCA programs, SEAs seemed generally satisfied with the SDFSCA applications they received from most districts. For example, SEAs disapproved one or more parts of applications from only 4 percent of districts. Only 23 percent of districts received comments from SEAs on their applications. For 15 percent of the districts, SEAs required additional information on student drug use and violence. See Table 2.4.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on SEA reviews of district applications.

One-third of the districts reported that SEAs influenced their choice of programs or purchases of materials.

These findings could be interpreted in at least two different ways. One interpretation is that SEAs use a vehicle other than the application process to influence district programs. Technical assistance is a possible approach. Another interpretation is that SEAs are satisfied with the prevention activities planned by districts and with the justification provided by the districts for the activities. This might be cause for concern given that, for example, only a small proportion of districts regularly conduct needs assessments. (See Chapter 5.)

Awareness of Federal initiatives. Approximately two-thirds of districts were aware of at least one major Federal initiative pertaining to the SDFSCA Program. For example, 75 percent were familiar with the Federal emphasis on assessing the effectiveness of programs. In spite of ED's efforts to disseminate information on the Principles of Effectiveness—including distributing guidance on the Principles to all SEAs and organizing a conference in June 1998 on implementing the Principles—only 65 percent of districts were aware of the Principles at the time of the survey. See Table 2.4.4 in Volume 2 for additional information on district awareness of Federal initiatives.

In spite of ED's efforts to disseminate information on the Principles of Effectiveness, only 65 percent of districts were aware of the Principles at the time of the survey.

3. Implementation of Prevention Programs

Once they select prevention efforts, districts coordinate with schools to implement the efforts. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) coordinators, who presumably lead implementation, often had limited time for prevention activities. Districts tended to implement activities that target students rather than school environments. More than half of the districts require schools to provide prevention activities and to meet other program requirements. Districts typically monitor the implementation of their prevention activities.

3.1 District Organization of Prevention Activities

Districts tend to administer prevention activities funded by SDFSCA and by other sources from the same organizational unit. SDFSCA coordinators, who typically have multiple work roles, have limited time available for prevention activities. Relatively few districts assign full-time prevention coordinators to individual schools.

Districts tend to administer the vast majority of prevention activities from the same organizational unit in which the SDFSCA coordinator is located. Approximately one-third of districts administer prevention activities from an office other than the SDFSCA office. This pattern varies substantially by district enrollment. Although only 18 percent of the very smallest districts operate any prevention activities out of offices other than the SDFSCA office, 63 percent of the very largest districts do so. See Table 3.1.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on operation of programs funded by SDFSCA and other sources.

Only 15 percent of the individuals who administer the SDFCA program are officially known as SDFSCA coordinators.

SDFSCA coordinators in districts tend to play multiple other work roles. Only 15 percent of them are officially known as SDFSCA coordinators. Other common job titles are superintendent or assistant superintendent (15%), counselor or social worker (14%), principal (11%), director of special projects (9%), director of health services (8%), and director of curriculum and instruction (7%).

More than half of SDFSCA coordinators spend no more than 5 percent of their time on the SDFSCA Program.

SDFSCA coordinators also typically devote limited time to prevention activities. More than half of SDFSCA coordinators spend no more than 5 percent of their time on the SDFSCA Program; another 20 percent of coordinators spend no more than 10 percent of their time on program activities. Only 2 percent of SDFSCA program coordinators are fully dedicated or almost fully dedicated to program activities. Some of these individuals may also work on prevention efforts funded by sources other than SDFSCA.

Relatively few districts (21%) have full-time prevention coordinators assigned to schools

Relatively few districts (21%) have full-time prevention coordinators assigned to schools. Even in districts with these staffing arrangements, generally fewer than 20 percent of schools are staffed by such an individual. Fifty-seven percent of the very large school districts and 52 percent of the large school districts are

providing this staff resource to at least some of their schools, while only 12 percent of the small districts provide this resource. See Table 3.1.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on staff resources allocated to prevention services.

3.2 Types of Prevention Efforts

Districts more frequently supported prevention efforts directly targeted at individuals than at the classroom or school environment. Large districts adopted types of prevention activities that are research-based. However, the prevention activities that districts viewed as their most effective activities often were not research-based.

General types of activities. School districts are supporting many different types of drug and violence prevention activities with SDFSCA funds. (In addition to activities initiated at the district level, schools may initiate their own efforts. We were unable to capture information on those efforts in this study.) Prevention curriculum, instruction, or training activities are most frequently supported by school districts using SDFSCA funds—89 percent of school districts have such efforts in place. See Table 3-1. Programs that warn of the dangers of drugs (88%) and programs that focus on self-esteem (80%) are the activities next most frequently used by school districts to prevent or reduce both drug use and violence. Counseling, social work, or related activities are used by 57 percent of school districts.

In comparison to activities designed to change directly student knowledge, attitude, and behaviors, districts less frequently implement efforts targeted at environmental change.

In comparison to activities designed to change directly student knowledge, attitude, and behaviors, districts less frequently implement efforts targeted at environmental change. Thirty-six percent of districts provided training, supervision, or technical assistance in classroom management for teachers; 30 percent of districts engaged in the review, revision, or monitoring of discipline practices and procedures; and only 11 percent of districts conducted reorganization of school, grades, or schedules (e.g., school within a school, "houses," or "teams"). See Tables 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on use of specific prevention activities.

Staff training. A substantial proportion of districts provided SDFSCA-funded training to students or school staff. Sixty-nine percent of districts offered training to students, presumably for peer mediation or similar activities. Just more than 70 percent of districts offered SDFSCA-funded training to teachers, guidance counselors, and school psychologists during the 1997-98 school year.

The very large and large school districts were substantially more likely to offer training to staff than the very small school districts. For example, slightly more than 90 percent of very large districts and 86 percent of large districts offered training to school administrators. However, only 43 percent of the very small districts provided training to school administrators. See Table 3.2.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on staff training.

Table 3-1. Percent of districts funding school activities with SDFSCA funds, by objective of activity

Activity	Used SDFSCA funds for activity %	If used SDFSCA funds for activity, objective of activity[1] Drug prevention %	Violence prevention %	Both drug and violence prevention %
Prevention curriculum, instruction or training for students, such as social skills training	89	10	2	88
Behavioral programming or behavior modification for students	52	9	9	83
Counseling, social work, psychological, or therapeutic activity for students	57	9	2	89
Other activities involving individual attention for students, such as tutoring or mentoring	38	5	2	93
Recreational, enrichment, or leisure activities for students	33	13	1	86
Student involvement in resolving student conduct problems, for example, dispute or conflict resolution, mediation, or student court	62	3	22	75
Training, supervision, or technical assistance in classroom management for teachers	36	3	15	82
Review, revision, or monitoring of discipline practices and procedures	30	6	7	86
Involvement of parents or community experts in efforts to prevent school drug use and violence	57	14	1	85
Reorganization of school, grades, or schedules, for example, school within a school, "houses" or "teams" of students to prevent or reduce violence or drug use	11	15	3	82
Information-only programs	54	20	0	80
Programs that warned of the dangers of drugs[2]	88	42	1	57
Programs that focused on self-esteem enhancement	80	8	2	90
Other	11	11	8	81

NOTE: The first column of numbers reports the percentages of districts funding school activities with SDFSCA funds. The remaining columns of numbers report the objectives of those school activities (i.e., activities funded with SDFSCA funds).

1 Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

2 For logistical reasons, violence prevention was a response option for this question.

Use of research-based prevention approaches. Perhaps in part because districts have a limited understanding of what constitutes an effective program, very few districts are using research-based prevention efforts. In a comprehensive review of the prevention literature (including literature on drug and violence prevention) for a report to Congress, Gottfredson (1997) identified the following types of efforts as having been demonstrated to be effective in controlled evaluations: (a) building school capacity (e.g., organizational development), (b) establishing norms and setting rules, (c) implementing curriculum and instruction directed at social competencies (e.g., problem solving skills and conflict resolution), and (d) using behavioral and cognitive-behavioral modification efforts. In addition, one should be mindful that "Even the best designed program can show uneven results because of obstacles to implementation" (Drug Strategies, 1995).

Using the Gottfredson (1997) assessment, we found that only 9 percent of districts are using drug prevention efforts that are research-based. An equivalent proportion of districts are using violence prevention efforts that are research-based. See Table 3-2. A much higher proportion of districts—25 to 37 percent—are using elements of research-based programs; however, we are unable to judge the likely effectiveness of the resulting whole activities. Because the comparisons of district prevention efforts against the external criteria are based on district reports that were often incomplete and ambiguous, we urge the reader to interpret these results as more preliminary than conclusive. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that the emphasis placed by the Principles of Effectiveness on using research-based prevention efforts may be well justified.

Less than 10 percent of districts are using drug and violence prevention efforts that are research-based.

Perceptions of most effective and costly prevention activities. Although the findings presented in the previous section raise doubts about the extent to which the vast majority of districts are adopting research-based prevention efforts, districts readily identified activities—in response to open-ended questions—that they are implementing and they perceive as effective. In interpreting the results, one should be mindful that the district perceptions are often based on SDFSCA coordinator observations and conclusions. As discussed in Chapter 5, this basis is likely to be seriously flawed.

Table 3-2. Percent of districts using prevention activities that are supported by research, by type of activity

	Extent of support by research	
Type of activity	**Activities supported by research %**	**Activities with elements supported by research %**
Drug prevention	9	25
Violence prevention	9	37
Most costly prevention activity[1]	9	28

NOTE: Results are based on responses to multiple survey questions. Between 359 and 407 districts provided responses to a given question.

1 In addition to asking respondents to name their most effective drug prevention or violence prevention activities or programs, we asked them to name their most costly prevention activity. The most costly activity could be a drug prevention or violence prevention activity. Also, it could overlap with the most effective drug prevention or violence prevention activity that respondents named.

Districts identified a diverse array of activities as their most effective drug prevention activity (which may or may not be research-based). The activities include mental health services, peer mediation/counseling, and extracurricular activities. They also include specific, named curricula such as Here's Looking at You 2000 and Life Skills. See Table 3-3. In addition, 18 percent of districts identified Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) as their most effective drug prevention activity. (We report on DARE separately because, in response to open-ended questions, districts much more frequently identified it than any other specific prevention education activity.) See Table 3.2.6 in Volume 2 for additional information on specific prevention education activities. Districts considered activities as their most effective drug prevention efforts based on evaluation results from either internal (33%) or external (5%) sources, as often as they based their judgements on SDFSCA coordinator observations and conclusions (38%). See Table 3.2.4 in Volume 2 for additional information on district perceptions of their most effective and costly prevention activities.

Table 3-3 Percentage of districts naming specific activities as their most effective type of drug prevention activity

Type of activity	Percent
General prevention education[1]	21
Specific prevention education[2]	21
DARE[3]	18
Mental health services[4]	16
Peer mediation/counseling	5
Extracurricular activities	5
Assemblies	4
Other[5]	10
Total	100

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 407 districts.

1 This category includes activities reported as classroom education, information about consequences of crime, drug prevention, gang violence prevention, and violence prevention programs.

2 This category includes the programs All Stars, BABES, Here's Looking at You 2000, Life Skills, Second Step, and Smart Choices.

3 We report on DARE separately because, in response to open-ended questions, districts identified it much more frequently than any other specific prevention education activity.

4 This category includes counseling, student assistance programs, and behavior modification.

5 This category includes alternative education, parent education, mentoring, tutoring, conflict resolution, community involvement, drug testing of students, and staff training.

As with drug prevention efforts, districts viewed many different types of activities as their most effective violence prevention effort. See Table 3-4. These activities include general, unnamed prevention activities (e.g., classroom education) and mental health services. Nine percent of districts considered DARE as their most effective violence prevention effort. Although considering DARE a violence prevention effort may be surprising to some, because drug use is associated with violent behaviors, many practitioners and researchers argue that preventing drug use is an important part of preventing violence. Slightly more districts based their assessment of violence prevention program effectiveness on evaluation results from either internal (40%) or external (5%) sources than on SDFSCA coordinator observations and conclusions. Fourteen percent of school districts viewed the same activity as most effective at preventing drug abuse and at promoting school safety and preventing violence.

Table 3-4. Percentage of districts naming specific activities as their most effective type of violence prevention activity

Type of activity	Percent
Specific prevention education[1]	22
Conflict resolution	16
General prevention education[2]	12
Peer mediation/counseling	12
Mental health services[3]	11
DARE[4]	9
Assemblies	6
Police involvement	3
Other[5]	8
Total	99

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 159 districts.

1. This category includes the programs All Stars, BASIS, Here's Looking at You 2000, Life Skills, Second Step, and Smart Choice.
2. This category includes activities reported as classroom education, information about consequences of crime, drug prevention, gang violence prevention, and violence prevention programs.
3. This category includes counseling, student assistance programs, and behavior modification.
4. We report on DARE separately because, in response to open-ended questions, districts identified it much more frequently than any other specific prevention education activity.
5. This category includes alternative education, parent education, extra curricular activities, Red Ribbon Week, community involvement, and staff training.

Districts also identified the prevention activity on which they allocated the most resources. For more than 60 percent of districts, the drug prevention program viewed as most effective is also the one on which the district spent the greatest amount of funding. This means that the most costly drug prevention activity for 40 percent of districts was something other than the drug prevention activity that they viewed as their most effective activity. In contrast, in only 12 percent of districts, the violence prevention program viewed as most effective received the greatest amount of prevention funding. Districts most frequently considered as their most expensive efforts specific, named prevention activities (20%) and general, unnamed prevention activities (17%). See Table 3-5. See Table 3.2.5 in Volume 2 for additional information on the students served by the activities that districts perceive as their most effective and costly prevention activities.

Table 3-5. Percentage of districts naming specific activities as their most expensive type of prevention activity

Type of activity	Percent
Specific prevention education[1]	20
General prevention education[2]	17
Mental health services[3]	16
DARE[4]	13
Assemblies	5
Extracurricular activities	5
Peer mediation/counseling	4
Red Ribbon Week	4
Conflict resolution	3
Staff	3
Other[5]	9
Total	100

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 393 districts.

1 This category includes the programs All Stars, BABES, Here's Looking at You 2000, Life Skills, Second Step, and Smart Choice.

2 This category includes activities reported as classroom education, information about consequences of crime, drug prevention, gang violence prevention, and violence prevention programs.

3 This category includes counseling, student assistance programs, and behavior modification.

4 We report on DARE separately because, in response to open-ended questions, districts identified it much more frequently than any other specific prevention education activity.

5 This category includes alternative education, parent education, police involvement, staff training, community involvement, mentoring, tutoring, safety and security measures.

3.3 Implementation of Prevention Efforts

The majority of districts required schools to provide prevention activities for students. A sizeable proportion targeted prevention activities to types of students or schools. Districts frequently engaged in program monitoring of one sort or another.

Requirements for prevention. More than half of the districts required schools to provide a specified minimum number of hours of prevention activities for elementary, middle, or high school students. The minimum number of hours required ranged from 5 to 250 hours. See Table 3.3.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on the extent of prevention activities required for students.

More than half of districts required schools to provide a specified minimum number of hours of prevention activities for elementary, middle, or high school students.

A number of districts also required schools to perform certain activities in order to receive SDFSCA funding. A substantial minority of districts (44%) require schools to assess the need for prevention activities; 49 percent require schools to prepare plans on how they will use prevention funds; and 51 percent require schools to evaluate prevention activities. See Table 3-6. See Table 3.3.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on district requirements for schools relating to their SDFSCA funds.

Table 3-6 Percent of districts requiring activities for schools related to their use of SDFSCA funds

	Extent to which activity required	
Activity	**Required %**	**Encouraged but not required %**
Prepare plans specifying how resources will be used	49	40
Select programs or activities from an approved list	25	57
Conduct a needs assessment	44	42
Evaluate program activities	51	39
Report progress in meeting goals to the district	50	39

NOTE: Results are based on responses to multiple survey questions. Between 405 and 410 districts provided responses to a given question.

Targeting services. Some districts target services to high risk students and students who are moving from one educational level to the next. High risk students are especially likely to be targeted for services in very large school districts and in urban school districts. See Table 3.3.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on targeting of services to high risk students.

Only 39 percent of districts target schools for specific drug and violence prevention services. When deciding whether or not to target schools for prevention services, districts are very likely to consider the extent of student drug abuse. Many districts also consider the levels of one or more of the following student suspension, expulsion, or referral to alternative education programs. They also consider school administration support for prevention efforts; victimization, bullying, and vandalism; student absenteeism and drop out rates; and parental concern or political pressure. See Table 3.3.4 in Volume 2 for additional information on targeting of services by extent of drug and safety problems.

High risk students are especially likely to be targeted for services in very large school districts and in urban school districts.

Program monitoring. A large proportion of districts engaged in some type of program monitoring. Eighty-six percent of school districts monitored the extent to which program activities were implemented as intended, and 74 percent of school districts monitored the number and characteristics of students served. See Tables 3.3.5 and 3.3.6 in Volume 2 for additional information on monitoring program implementation.

A large proportion of districts engaged in program monitoring.

4. Resources for Prevention Programs

Funding for prevention activities is a serious issue at the district level. For the vast majority of districts, the per student Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) allocations are small. However, districts do typically receive funding for prevention from additional other sources. Many districts report that their prevention efforts rely heavily on SDFSCA funding.

4.1 Funding for Prevention

Districts typically receive small amounts of SDFSCA funding per student from the main program. A small proportion of districts also receive funding from the "greatest needs" and Governors' portions of the program. In addition, the majority of districts receive funding from at least one source besides SDFSCA.

Overall levels of funding. The 1997-98 SDFSCA budget, $531 million for state grants, may appear to be a huge sum of money. When spread among the 42 million children enrolled in public schools (plus the millions of children enrolled in private schools), however, the funding available per child for prevention is less than the cost of a single textbook. Except for the small number of districts receiving greatest needs funding (9% of districts), most school districts receive nominal SDFSCA allocations. For 60 percent of school districts without greatest needs funding, the allocation amounts to less than $6 per pupil. See Table 4-1.

Except for the small number of districts receiving greatest needs funding (9% of districts), most school districts receive nominal SDFSCA allocations.

Two-thirds of districts received funding from sources other than SDFSCA for prevention activities in the 1997-98 school year. These sources and the proportion of districts that received them are as follows: state funds (34%); school district or local government funds (31%); private foundation grants (9%); businesses (19%); law enforcement agencies (31%); and community groups, such as the Lions and Kiwanis Clubs (24%). See Table 4-2. See Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on non-SDFSCA sources of funding.

Greatest needs funding. Twenty-eight percent of children nationally were enrolled in the 9 percent of school districts that are receiving supplemental greatest needs funding. The funds were more likely to be targeted at districts with large enrollments than districts with small enrollments: 75 percent of very large school districts (i.e., districts enrolling 90,000 or more students) received greatest needs funding, compared to 29 percent of large school districts (i.e., districts enrolling from 10,001 to 89,999 students), 15 percent of medium sized school districts (i.e., districts enrolling from 2,501 to 10,000 students), and 5 percent or fewer of the smaller school districts (i.e., districts enrolling 2,500 or fewer students).

Two thirds of districts received funding from sources other than SDFSCA for prevention activities in the 1997-98 school year

Table 4-1. Percent of districts receiving SDFSCA prevention funding, by per pupil funding and district characteristics

	Per pupil SDFSCA funding				
Characteristic	**Less than $4 %**	**$4 to 5.99 %**	**$6 to 7.99 %**	**$8 to 9.99 %**	**$10 or More %**
Enrollment					
Less than 300	8	36	11	0	45
300 to 1,000	14	49	14	7	16
1,001 to 2,500	8	57	18	4	13
2,501 to 10,000	3	51	18	5	23
10,001 to 89,999	7	42	23	2	26
Greater than or equal to 90,000	8	17	17	8	50
Urbanicity					
Urban	9	38	16	5	32
Suburban	5	59	16	2	18
Rural	10	43	16	6	26
Percent minority enrollment					
Less than or equal to 5%	8	46	19	5	23
5.1 to 20%	10	55	7	4	25
20.1 to 50%	2	51	20	3	23
Greater than 50%	13	44	14	5	24
Poverty[1]					
High poverty quartile	4	46	13	7	28
High/medium poverty quartile	13	45	12	3	27
Low/medium poverty quartile	11	43	21	4	21
Low poverty quartile	3	60	16	3	18
Receiving SDFSCA greatest needs funding					
Yes	3	16	8	9	64
No[2]	9	51	17	4	19

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 403 districts.

1 Based on 1995 national estimates from the Bureau of the Census, we defined the poverty quartiles in terms of the percent of children in districts living in poverty: high poverty quartile, greater than 27.4 percent of children; high/medium poverty quartile, 16.5 to 27.4 percent of children; low/medium poverty quartile, 8.8 to 16.5 percent of children; and low poverty quartile, less than 8.8 percent of children.

2 Although it may seem unusual that districts not receiving needs funding received a SDFSCA allocation of more than $10, these findings are based on survey responses. These findings may reflect the difficulty for some districts to report budget information on this program accurately.

Table 4-2. Percent of districts receiving non-SDFSCA prevention funding, by per pupil funding and district characteristics

Characteristic	No additional prevention funds %	Per pupil non-SDFSCA funding: Less than $4 %	$4 to 5.99 %	$6 to 7.99 %	$8 to 9.99 %	$10 or More %
Enrollment						
Less than 300	40	14	8	2	6	31
300 to 1,000	51	21	10	6	0	12
1,001 to 2,500	35	36	7	3	4	15
2,501 to 10,000	27	33	5	6	3	25
10,001 to 89,999	20	32	2	3	23	20
Greater than or equal to 90,000	15	35	10	10	20	10
Urbanicity						
Urban	10	20	15	3	5	48
Suburban	32	27	5	4	7	26
Rural	42	28	8	4	3	14
Percent minority enrollment						
Less than or equal to 5%	40	30	8	3	2	18
5.1 to 20%	31	24	8	6	5	25
20.1 to 50%	40	18	4	4	12	20
Greater than 50%	28	53	5	6	6	22
Poverty[1]						
High poverty quartile	45	24	1	10	4	16
High/medium poverty quartile	34	27	9	4	5	21
Low/medium poverty quartile	36	29	8	3	5	20
Low poverty quartile	35	28	9	1	3	23
Receiving SDFSCA greatest need funding						
Yes	38	27	7	4	4	19
No	24	25	8	5	4	33

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 377 districts.

1 Based on 1995 national estimates from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, we defined the poverty quartiles in terms of the percent of children in districts living in poverty: high poverty quartile, greater than 27.4 percent of children; high/medium poverty quartile, 16.5 to 27.4 percent of children; low/medium poverty quartile, 8.8 to 16.5 percent of children; and low poverty quartile, less than 8.8 percent of children.

For many of the districts receiving greatest needs funding (77%), the funding allowed them to increase services for the neediest students. For nearly two-thirds of these districts (64%), the greatest needs funding also permitted them to increase services to the neediest schools. Of the districts receiving greatest needs funding, 75 percent used the funds to increase training for teachers. Eighty-six percent of the districts receiving these funds reported that the funding resulted in the reduction of drug abuse problems, violence problems, or both types of problems. See Table 4.1.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on the influence of greatest needs funds.

Governors' Program funding. Few districts (2%) received grants from the Governors' portion of the SDFSCA Program. Of the districts receiving SDFSCA Governors' Program funding, 60 percent used the funds for community efforts, including school participation in community coalition prevention efforts; recruiting students for involvement in community-based prevention efforts; and integrating community projects into school activities. Districts also reported using these funds to increase the availability of services (60%) and to support school participation in community coalition needs assessments (30%). See Table 4.1.4 in Volume 2 for additional information on the use of Governors' funds.

4.2 Spending on Prevention

Districts most often allocated prevention funding to program materials and implementation. For some districts, the single most expensive prevention activity exceeds their SDFSCA budget.

General program activities. Districts were most likely to allocate SDFSCA and non-SDFSCA funding to program materials and implementation. Eighty-five percent of districts allocated SDFSCA funds to purchase materials; half of districts allocated non-SDFSCA funds to purchase materials. See Table 4-3. Relatively few districts allocated SDFSCA funds to purchase equipment (e.g., metal detectors). Seventy-three percent of districts allocated SDFSCA funds to program implementation; 46 percent of districts allocated non-SDFSCA funds to program implementation.

District estimates of their spending on prevention activities, especially on implementation, may seriously understate the total amount of that spending. These estimates are based on the amount of SDFSCA and other funding that districts have available centrally for prevention. We expect that, for many districts, the estimates omit costs incurred at the school level. Prominent among these costs are those for teacher hours for implementing district-supported prevention curricula. As discussed in Section 3.2, prevention instruction is one of the most frequent types of prevention activities supported by districts. Hence, we suspect that many districts indirectly fund the implementation of these activities from budget categories other than prevention, such as general instruction categories that include teacher salaries. In this sense, some of the district spending on prevention may be "hidden" and omitted from our estimates of spending on prevention.

Districts were most likely to allocate SDFSCA and non-SDFSCA funding to program materials and implementation.

Districts were least likely to allocate SDFSCA and non-SDFSCA funds to program selection and evaluation.

Districts were least likely to allocate SDFSCA and non-SDFSCA funds to program selection and evaluation. Seventy-four percent of districts allocated no SDFSCA funds to program selection; 86 percent of districts allocated no non-SDFSCA funding to program selection. Sixty-three percent of districts allocated no SDFSCA funds to evaluation; 80 percent of districts allocated no non-SDFSCA funding to evaluation. See Tables 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on district expenditures.

Table 4-3. Percent of districts allocating SDFSCA and non-SDFSCA prevention funding, by type of activity

Activity and percent of funding allocated	Type of funding	
	SDFSCA[1] %	Non-SDFSCA[2] %
Materials		
No funds allocated	15	50
Less than 20%	33	24
20 to 39%	30	11
40 to 59%	10	7
60 to 79%	5	3
More than 79%	8	6
Program selection		
No funds allocated	74	86
Less than 20%	22	13
20 to 39%	3	1
40 to 59%	0	0
60 to 79%	0	0
More than 79%	0	0
Training		
No funds allocated	33	63
Less than 20%	35	18
20 to 39%	19	12
40 to 59%	9	3
60 to 79%	3	1
More than 79%	0	2
Program implementation		
No funds allocated	27	54
Less than 20%	13	4
20 to 39%	17	9
40 to 59%	17	9
60 to 79%	12	5
More than 79%	15	18
Evaluation		
No funds allocated	63	80
Less than 20%	34	18
20 to 39%	2	1
40 to 59%	1	0
60 to 79%	0	0
More than 79%	0	0
Other administrative activities		
No funds allocated	65	79
Less than 20%	26	15
20 to 39%	5	4
40 to 59%	2	1
60 to 79%	1	0
More than 79%	1	1
Other activities[3]		
No funds allocated	71	82
Less than 20%	8	4
20 to 39%	8	2
40 to 59%	4	2
60 to 79%	4	1
More than 79%	6	9

1. Results are based on responses to multiple survey questions. Between 392 and 419 districts provided responses to a given question.
2. Results are based on responses to multiple survey questions. Between 363 and 416 districts provided responses to a given question.
3. Other includes drug testing of students.

Type of prevention activities. The use of SDFSCA funding varies considerably by type of program activity. A large proportion of districts fund drug and violence prevention instruction either solely with SDFSCA monies or with both SDFSCA and other funds. Twenty-three percent of districts fund drug prevention instruction with only SDFSCA funds; 10 percent use only non-SDFSCA funds; 65 percent use both SDFSCA and other monies to fund these activities; and only 1 percent of districts do not provide drug prevention instruction. See Table 4-4. Similarly, 20 percent of districts fund violence prevention instruction solely with SDFSCA funds, while 57 percent of districts use both SDFSCA and other resources to fund this type of prevention activity. In contrast, forty-two percent of districts fund the communication of standards for behavior (i.e., informing students about school rules and the consequences of violating those rules) solely with non-SDFSCA funds. Notably, 39 percent of school districts provide no assistance to schools for needs assessment, 54 percent provide no assistance for program selection, and 48 percent provide no assistance to schools for program evaluation. See Table 4.2.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on how services are funded.

Table 4-4. Percent of districts supporting prevention activities, by source of funding

	Source of funding			
Activity	**SDFSCA %**	**Non-SDFSCA %**	**Both SDFSCA and Non-SDFSCA %**	**Activity not supported %**
Special, one-time events	29	18	48	4
Drug prevention instruction	23	10	65	1
Requisitioning and distribution of program manuals, materials, and supplies	22	17	31	31
Conflict resolution or peer mediation	21	20	39	20
Training in program implementation	21	16	25	38
Violence prevention instruction	20	13	57	10
Assistance with conducting needs assessment	17	27	17	39
Training in program planning and development	17	19	22	41
Student support services, for example, student assistance programs, counseling, mentoring, identification and referral	14	30	46	10
Parent education/involvement	13	26	37	25
Program evaluation assistance	13	17	21	48
Team building or organization development assistance	12	28	22	38
Technical assistance in selecting programs or activities to implement	12	17	17	54
Training or assistance in financial management for prevention programs	9	11	10	71
Communication of standards for student behavior	8	42	34	16
Community service projects	6	35	22	37
After-school or before-school programs	5	32	17	46
Alternative education programs	3	45	15	37
Services for out-of-school youth (school age)	2	17	5	76

NOTE: Results are based on responses to multiple survey questions. Between 403 and 413 districts provided responses to a given question.

Most effective prevention activities. The cost of the prevention activities identified by districts as their most effective exceeded the SDFSCA funding of some districts. This means that districts had to supplement their SDFSCA funding to support those activities. For 15 percent of districts, the drug prevention effort that they identified as their most effective cost more than 100 percent of their total SDFSCA allocation. See Table 4-5. For 29 percent of the very small school districts, the most effective drug prevention effort exceeded 100 percent of their total SDFSCA allocation.

The cost of the prevention activities identified by districts as their most effective exceeded the SDFSCA funding of some districts.

Table 4-5. Percent of districts allocating SDFSCA funding to their most effective drug prevention activity, by percent of allocation and district characteristics

	Cost of activity, as percent of SDFSCA allocation					
Characteristic	**Less than 20%**	**20 to 39%**	**49 to 59%**	**60 to 79%**	**80 to 99%**	**More than 100%[1]**
Enrollment						
Less than 300	18	18	16	1	18	29
300 to 1,000	46	18	8	5	10	14
1,001 to 2,500	42	20	6	1	16	15
2,501 to 10,000	42	20	10	9	8	11
10,001 to 89,999	69	13	6	10	0	2
Greater than or equal to 90,000	61	33	0	0	0	6
Urbanicity						
Urban	41	8	13	23	0	15
Suburban	42	19	10	5	11	13
Rural	39	20	8	3	14	18
Percent minority enrollment						
Less than or equal to 5%	38	23	7	2	15	14
5.1 to 20%	36	13	11	7	10	22
20.1 to 50%	44	18	14	6	9	9
Greater than 50%	53	10	9	6	1	20
Poverty[2]						
High poverty quartile	35	17	6	7	16	19
High/medium poverty quartile	46	13	10	3	9	19
Low/medium poverty quartile	36	27	9	4	15	9
Low poverty quartile	42	18	10	4	10	16
Receiving SDFSCA						
Yes	40	19	9	4	12	15
No	43	20	12	11	7	7

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 362 districts.

1. More than 100 percent of SDFSCA allocation indicates that districts also are using non-SDFSCA funds.

2. Based on national estimates for 1995 from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, we defined the poverty quartiles in terms of the percent of children in districts living in poverty: high poverty quartile, greater than 27.4 percent of children; high/medium poverty quartile, 16.5 to 27.4 percent of children; low/medium poverty quartile, 8.8 to 16.4 percent of children; and low poverty quartile, less than 8.8 percent of children.

The cost of the violence prevention activity that districts identified as their most effective activity also exceeded the SDFSCA funding for some districts. For 14 percent of districts, the cost of their most effective violence prevention effort exceeded 100 percent of their SDFSCA allocation. See Table 4-6. For 30 percent of the very small districts, their most effective violence prevention effort costs exceeded 100 percent of their total SDFSCA allocation.

Table 4-6. Percent of districts allocating SDFSCA funding to their most effective violence prevention activity, by percent of allocation and district characteristics

	Cost of activity, as percent of SDFSCA allocation					
Characteristic	**Less than 20%**	**20 to 39%**	**49 to 59%**	**60 to 79%**	**80 to 99%**	**More than 100%[1]**
Enrollment						
Less than 300	25	13	12	5	15	30
300 to 1,000	53	11	12	4	3	18
1,001 to 2,500	51	15	8	5	10	10
2,501 to 10,000	51	23	10	5	4	7
10,001 to 89,999	73	8	8	7	3	1
Greater than or equal to 90,000	71	23	0	0	6	0
Urbanicity						
Urban	46	14	12	1	13	14
Suburban	52	15	8	6	6	13
Rural	45	16	12	4	8	15
Percent minority enrollment						
Less than or equal to 5%	48	13	9	7	10	13
5.1 to 20%	48	18	9	2	3	20
20.1 to 50%	41	24	15	0	11	9
Greater than 50%	60	12	11	1	0	17
Poverty[2]						
High poverty quartile	49	14	10	5	7	16
High/medium poverty quartile	52	13	13	1	5	17
Low/medium poverty quartile	49	19	12	2	11	7
Low poverty quartile	42	16	7	11	7	18
Receiving SDFSCA						
Yes	47	16	10	4	8	15
No	60	14	8	7	5	5

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 317 districts.

1 More than 100 percent of SDFSCA allocation indicates that districts also are using non-SDFSCA funds.

2 Based on national estimates for 1995 from the US Bureau of the Census, we defined the poverty quartiles in terms of the percent of children in districts living in poverty: high poverty quartile, greater than 27.4 percent of children; high/medium poverty quartile, 16.5 to 27.4 percent of children; low/medium poverty quartile, 8.8 to 16.4 percent of children; and low poverty quartile, less than 8.8 percent of children.

The cost of the prevention activity identified by districts as their most expensive activity is similar to that of the most expensive drug prevention activity. This is expected given that the most effective drug prevention program for 65 percent of districts also was their most expensive effort. See Table 4-7.

Table 4-7. Percent of districts allocating SDFSCA funding to their most expensive prevention activity, by percent of allocation and district characteristics

	Cost of activity, as percent of SDFSCA allocation					
Characteristic	**Less than 20%**	**20 to 39%**	**49 to 59%**	**60 to 79%**	**80 to 99%**	**More than 100%[1]**
Enrollment						
Less than 300	9	26	16	1	15	33
300 to 1,000	16	26	18	8	13	18
1,001 to 2,500	22	24	8	11	18	16
2 501 to 10,000	30	25	13	6	10	15
10,001 to 89,999	55	15	15	11	2	1
Greater than or equal to 90,000	38	56	0	0	0	6
Urbanicity						
Urban	24	20	14	15	13	14
Suburban	24	27	14	6	12	19
Rural	21	24	13	8	15	19
Percent minority enrollment						
Less than or equal to 5%	18	28	13	8	15	18
5 1 to 20%	20	22	14	9	14	22
20 1 to 50%	34	19	18	3	13	13
Greater than 50%	38	20	9	6	1	25
Poverty[2]						
High poverty quartile	22	24	6	11	17	20
High/medium poverty quartile	29	20	17	3	10	21
Low/medium poverty quartile	19	27	17	9	16	12
Low poverty quartile	19	28	11	7	12	23
Receiving SDFSCA						
Yes	21	25	13	7	14	20
No	31	24	15	13	8	8

NOTE: Results are based on responses from 353 districts.

1. More than 100 percent of SDFSCA allocation indicates that districts also are using non-SDFSCA funds.
2. Based on national estimates for 1995 from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, we defined the poverty quartiles in terms of the percent of children in districts living in poverty: high poverty quartile, greater than 27.4 percent of children; high/medium poverty quartile, 16.5 to 27.4 percent of children; low/medium poverty quartile, 8.8 to 16.4 percent of children; and low poverty quartile, less than 8.8 percent of children.

4.3 Importance of SDFSCA Funding

Districts reported that SDFSCA funding is critical to their prevention programs. Almost half of districts (46%) would be likely to lose their prevention program if they lost their SDFSCA funding. Districts would decrease the number of hours of services to students either by a great extent (35%) or by a very great extent (42%), if they lost SDFSCA funding. See Table 4-8. The majority of districts also would decrease the number of students receiving services and the number of prevention programs and activities if funding were eliminated. See Tables 4.3.1 through 4.3.3 in Volume 2 for more information on the expected effects of SDFSCA funding changes.

Almost half of districts (46%) would be likely to lose their prevention program if they lost their SDFSCA funding

Table 4-8. Percent of districts reporting changes to prevention efforts if they no longer received SDFSCA funds, by type and extent of change

	Extent of change			
Type of change	**Very small %**	**Small %**	**Great %**	**Very great %**
Decrease number of hours of services received by students	6	11	35	42
Decrease number of students receiving services	6	11	33	37
Decrease number of activities	4	10	36	47
Decrease involvement of community and/or volunteers	12	23	24	23
Decrease training for teachers	8	20	28	34
Eliminate all prevention programming	4	14	25	29
Other[1]	2	2	7	12

Note: Results are based on responses from between 394 and 418 districts.

1 Other potential changes include elimination of staff.

5. Evaluation and Reporting

Evaluation should inform the planning and program development phase of programming. Districts typically collect information from schools on incidents of problem behavior and from other sources. However, many districts use methods that raise questions about the validity and usefulness of the information collected. Districts use the information that they collect in a variety of ways. A large proportion of districts may need technical assistance on program evaluation and on other program-related topics.

5.1 Monitoring Incidents of Drug Use and Violence

The ongoing monitoring of incidents of drug use and violence by districts can serve as a valuable tool for gauging progress towards goals, for detecting trends in problem behavior, and for understanding how problem behavior responds to changes in policy and prevention strategies. A large proportion of districts require reporting of serious incidents by schools. The quality of the information on incidents is questionable, however. Districts tend to report relatively little information on incidents to parents and the general public.

Districts most frequently require reports from schools on serious types of incidents of problem behavior.

Types of Incidents Schools are Required to Report to Districts

Districts most frequently require reports from schools on the more serious types of incidents. These types of incidents include student possession of weapons (97%), student use of drugs at schools or school-sponsored events (95%), sale of drugs and alcohol on school grounds (93%), vandalism of school property, including fires (92%), physical conflict among students (90%), and physical abuse of teachers (89%). Additionally, a large proportion of districts (89%) required schools to report absenteeism or class cutting. More than half of districts also require reports from schools on hate crimes (75%), robbery or theft of items valued at more than $10 (75%), and trespassing (62%). See Table 5.1.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on district reporting requirements.

The most frequently reported schemes that districts use for organizing incident data are by school (91%), which can allow districts to follow trends within schools.

Tracking Incidents

Districts vary considerably on how they track and organize the incident information that they collect from schools. This is relevant because it defines how districts can use the incident information. The most frequently reported schemes that districts use for organizing their information are by school (91%)—which can allow districts to follow trends within schools—and by type of incident (77%)—which can allow districts to follow trends in types of incidents. A smaller proportion of districts organized this information by individual, either victim or perpetrator (59%). Hence, less than 60 percent of districts have the capability to use information on the problem behavior of individual students or others (e.g., school staff, parents, and other community members) for example, as part of documentation on disciplinary actions or to identify the need for special services. See Table 5.1.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on district tracking of incidents.

Ensuring That Schools are Reporting Incidents Appropriately. Although information collection and reporting systems should contain procedures for ensuring information quality, many districts lack these types of procedures. Only 75 percent of districts routinely followup with staff when incident forms are submitted with missing or inconsistent information. A smaller proportion of districts train staff on completing incident forms (59%) or distribute a handbook on procedures for completing the forms (54%). Only 14 percent of districts reported that they audit school records to ensure that schools accurately report incident information. See Table 5.1.3 in Volume 2 for additional information on district information quality procedures.

Although information collection and reporting systems should contain procedures for ensuring information quality, many districts lack these types of procedures.

While they raise questions about the quality of district incident information, the survey findings are silent on whether the lack of measures to ensure the quality of incident information (e.g., training and procedures on completing incident forms) found for many districts reflects more the simple nature of the forms in use (e.g., forms may be straightforward enough to make these measures unnecessary) or potential information quality problems.

Reporting Information on Incidents to the Public. On the whole, the majority of districts report little information on school safety and student drug abuse to parents and the general public. Although 40 percent of districts report general information on some or all incidents, smaller proportions report more specific information on incidents: 27 percent report all incidents individually, 10 percent report certain categories of incidents, and 6 percent only report severe incidents. Seventeen percent of districts report no information on school safety and student drug abuse to parents and the general public. See Table 5.1.4 in Volume 2 for additional information on district incident reporting.

On the whole, the majority of districts report little information on school safety and student drug abuse to parents and the general public.

5.2 Methods for Assessing Needs for and Evaluating Prevention Efforts

Districts can use information on incidents of problem behavior and information from other sources to assess needs and evaluate their prevention efforts. A large proportion of districts used valid measures for these purposes. However, the use of the measures still raises concerns, because the quality of the information underlying them may be suspect.

Measures Districts Used to Evaluate the Outcomes of Prevention Efforts. Districts have available to them an array of different measures for assessing needs and evaluating their Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA)-funded prevention efforts. Each type of measure provides a somewhat different type of information; each has strengths and limitations; and each may be more or less relevant to a specific district prevention effort. Ideally, districts will use multiple measures to compensate for the limitations of individual measures.

For evaluating problem behavior prevention efforts, a widely used measure is the percentage of students self-reporting criminal or violent victimization. Sixty-three percent of districts reported that they used this type of measure, which is typically based on surveys of students, during the 1997-98 school year. Additionally, 77 percent of districts used the number of criminal and violent incidents at schools, which is typically based on incident reporting systems. The percentage of students self-reporting criminal or violent victimization measure has the advantage of capturing information on less serious incidents that may be invisible to incident reporting systems. Those less serious incidents (e.g., threats of violence) are important because they are much more frequent than the serious incidents; they can still interfere with learning (e.g., by deterring students from attending school); and they can indicate the potential for more serious incidents. The number of incidents measure may capture serious types of incidents more completely than student reports of victimization, because those reports are often collected from a sample of students; however, the number of incidents measure will miss many unreported less serious incidents. See Table 5.2.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on district use of measures.

For evaluating problem behavior prevention efforts, a widely used measure is the percentage of students self-reporting criminal or violent victimization. Many districts also used the number of criminal and violent incidents at schools.

For evaluating drug prevention activities, a widely used measure is the percentage of students self-reporting alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. This type of measure could refer to any use or to use in schools. Eighty percent of districts reported that they measured any use during the 1997-98 school year. Large proportions of districts (73%) also reported using the percentage of students using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in schools. Two-thirds of districts also measured student attitudes toward alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. The any use measure provides a more relevant view of drug use than the use in schools measure, because drug use is suppressed in the controlled environment of a school. Moreover, the spirit of the SDFSCA program is to prevent any drug use, regardless of where it occurs. Student attitudes toward alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are a weaker measure than either of the othr two measures because they are less directly tied to behavior; however, some researchers and practitioners argue that they are associated with the likelihood of future use.

Information Collected by Districts From Different Sources. Measures of problem behavior are only as useful as the information on which they are based. For example, rates of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among students are most useful if they are based on a well-designed and well-implemented prevalence survey of students. (Such prevalence surveys include, for example, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the Monitoring the Future Survey.) During the 1997-98 school year, 35 percent of districts conducted a periodic prevalence survey of elementary school students; 57 percent of districts conducted a periodic prevalence survey of middle school students; and 61 percent of districts conducted a periodic prevalence survey of high school students. During the 1997-98 school year, most districts collected information on the scope of drug and violence

The quality of information is an issue for the districts that collected information with periodic prevalence surveys.

problems from school administrators, other school staff (e.g., teachers, guidance counselors, or school psychologists), and police or security. Districts reported that administrators (86%) and security (43%) were asked about incidents of drug use and violence. Other school staff were asked about their personal impressions of school safety (84%). They also reported that these individuals were asked for their personal impression of program effectiveness (administrators [75%], other school staff (87%], police and security [44%]). Eighty percent of districts used this information to assess the impact of existing programs; 81 percent used it to assess the need to add new prevention strategies. Evaluation information was also collected from community members such as parents (73%) and health care agencies or providers (49%). Eighty-one percent of districts collected personal impressions of program effectiveness from these sources—most (85%) also collected personal impressions of the level of drug use and violence in schools from them. More than three-fourths of districts used the information to assess the impact of existing programs (84%) and to assess the need to add new prevention strategies. See Tables 5.2.2 through 5.2.7 in Volume 2 for additional information on district information sources.

The quality of information is an issue for the districts that collected information with periodic prevalence surveys. To be valid, prevalence surveys must collect information from practically all potential respondents or from a sufficiently large probability sample of those potential respondents. A large proportion of districts failed to meet this standard. (We were unable to assess the adequacy of the sample sizes used by districts in probability samples. For this report, we assume that the sample sizes were sufficient.) Of those that surveyed elementary school students (35% of districts), 73 percent surveyed practically all students or a probability sample of students; of those that surveyed middle school students (57% of districts), 82 percent surveyed practically all students or a probability sample of students; of those that surveyed high school students (61% of districts), 82 percent surveyed practically all students or a probability sample of students. Hence, a relatively small proportion of districts collected information with a periodic prevalence survey using a valid selection method. 26 percent of districts surveyed elementary students using a valid method, 47 percent of districts surveyed middle school students using a valid method, and 50 percent of districts surveyed high school students using a valid method. See Tables 5.2.8 through 5.2.10 in Volume 2 for additional information on district student information gathering.

An additional factor than can affect the quality of an evaluation is whether it is conducted by an internal or external evaluator, or whether or not it is based on the observations of the program administrator. A window on this issue is provided by district responses about the basis for their identifying a specific drug prevention program as effective. Although 38 percent of districts indicated that an evaluation from an internal or external source was the basis for their judgment on the program, an additional 38 percent of districts based their judgment on SDFSCA coordinator observations or conclusions. Judgments based on coordinator observations or conclusions are likely to be weaker, given the potential for bias and the probable lack of systematic research methods. Similar rates apply for the violence prevention programs that districts identify as their most effective. See Tables 5.2.11 and 5.2.12 in Volume 2 for additional information on bases for identifying the most effective prevention programs.

Technical Assistance on Evaluation and Reporting. Although a large proportion of districts appeared to need technical assistance on program evaluation (e.g., based on the quality of prevalence survey information that they collected for evaluation), less than half of districts received it (39%) or reported

that they needed it (45%). The largest districts were more likely to receive technical assistance than other districts (e.g., 71% for the largest districts vs. 45% for districts with enrollments of 2,501 to 10,000 and 37% for districts with enrollments under 300).

5.3 Use of Research

Districts used the results of research on their own prevention efforts in many general and specific ways. They tended to use program-related research results to expand or modify existing programs more often than to eliminate programs. Potential information quality problems; however, raise questions about the decisions that were based on the results.

Information from district evaluations of prevention programs contributed to several different types of program actions. The most frequent actions were the addition of new programs to address problem areas (75%), activation of discussion among stakeholders (73%), and measurement of progress towards goals and objectives (72%). Less frequent actions were the reduction of activities that have been relatively ineffective (60%), elimination of activities that have been ineffective (59%), and modification of program targeting (59%). See Table 5.3.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on district use of evaluation.

Information from district evaluations of prevention programs contributed to several different types of program actions.

Districts tended to use information from a given source for multiple purposes. Of the districts that collected information from students on the scope of drug and violence problems during the 1997-98 school year, the majority used the information to assess the need to add new strategies (89%) or to assess the need to modify existing strategies (87%); 74 percent of these districts used the information to assess the need to drop existing strategies. Districts that collected information from school staff and police and security staff used the information to assess the need to add new strategies (83%), assess the need to modify existing strategies (80%), and to assess the need to drop existing strategies (73%). Districts that collected information from community members also used the information to assess the need to add new strategies (85%), assess the need to modify existing strategies (80%), and assess the need to drop existing strategies (71%). See Tables 5.3.2 through 5.3.7 in Volume 2 for additional information on district use of information sources.

The results on district use of information indicate that districts were more likely to modify existing programs than to eliminate those programs. One possible explanation is that the evidence standard is higher for dropping programs than it is for modifying them or adopting new programs. Efforts to drop programs can face active opposition, for example, from constituencies that may have developed for the programs and from staff whose positions may depend on the programs. Dropping programs can also be interpreted by district staff as admitting

The results on district use of information indicate that districts were more likely to modify existing programs than to eliminate those programs.

failure. Only the strongest findings indicating null program results may be able by themselves to overcome these types of forces. See Tables 5.3.8 and 5.3.9 in Volume 2 for additional information on district modification of prevention programs.

5.4 District Assessment of State Policies and Overall Program Impact

Besides more funding, districts would most like from their state education agencies (SEAs) more or improved information on prevention-related topics. Seventy-nine percent of districts would like more or improved information on research-based prevention programs. An equal proportion of districts would like more or improved information on evaluating prevention programs. A somewhat smaller proportion of districts would like more or improved information on program planning (62%) and program implementation (61%). Nineteen percent of districts would recommend that SEAs adopt stricter targeting of funds. See Table 5.4.1 in Volume 2 for additional information on district recommendations on SEA policies.

Seventy-nine percent of districts would like more or improved information on research-based prevention programs. An equal proportion of districts would like more or improved information on evaluating prevention programs.

Districts tended to view the SDFSCA Program more as a source of program support than in terms of the outcomes that it has achieved. More than three-fourths of districts (76%) reported that SDFSCA funding has helped them to continue useful programs. But less than half of districts reported that the funding has reduced school violence (40%) or has reduced student drug abuse (45%). Additionally, 29 percent of districts reported that SDFSCA funding had improved student academic performance.

These findings on how SDFSCA funds have helped districts varied considerably by district size. The very large districts (districts enrolling 90,000 or more students) were more likely than the smaller districts to report that funding led to reductions in school violence and student drug abuse, and to improvements in student academic performance. This pattern may well reflect the variation in the amount of SDFSCA funding that districts receive, which is directly related to district size. See Table 5.4.2 in Volume 2 for additional information on district perceptions of the SDFSCA program.

6. Implementing the Principles of Effectiveness

To provide a baseline for measuring district progress in complying with the Principles of Effectiveness, we assessed their current performance against these standards. The majority of districts seem to meet the first principle, which is to assess school and community needs and use that information in program planning. The quality of some of the information that districts use is suspect; we are unable to judge the extent to which they use this information effectively. However, many districts are unable to meet the second principle, which is to develop measurable goals and objectives and design programs to meet them. The third principle, which is to use research-based prevention activities, also is out of reach for many districts. On the fourth principle, which is to evaluate prevention efforts, many districts appear to be on track; again, the quality of some of the information used by districts is questionable and the extent to which they use information effectively is unclear. To comply with all of the principles, districts may require additional resources, in the form of technical assistance or funding.

6.1 Background

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) developed the Principles of Effectiveness to guide state and local implementation of the SDFSCA Program. In developing this framework, ED was responding to criticism that the SDFSCA Program lacked sufficient effectiveness and accountability. The Principles direct state education agencies (SEAs) and districts to plan and implement their SDFSCA programs in ways that are consistent with current understanding of how best to prevent and reduce student drug abuse and to promote school safety.

To provide a baseline for gauging district progress in implementing the Principles, we assessed their performance against those standards. (The Principles became effective after the reference period for this study.) The assessment also can provide information on the areas in which districts most need assistance to comply with the Principles in the future.

6.2 Principle 1: Base Programs on a Thorough Assessment of Objective Data about the Drug and Violence Problems in the Schools and Communities Served

The majority of districts are meeting this principle or are well along the path to doing so. See Chapter 5. Most districts are collecting information from a number of sources including students, teachers, school administrators, parents, and community representatives. Moreover, most districts are using this information to plan prevention programming. (We were unable to evaluate the adequacy of district efforts to use needs assessment data for planning.) For example, 89 percent of districts used student data information to assess the need to add new strategies.

The majority of districts are meeting principle 1 or are well along the path to doing so.

An area for improvement is the methods that many districts use to conduct prevalence surveys of students. Many districts are using flawed methods for such surveys, which are important sources of information for needs assessments and evaluations.

6.3 Principle 2: Design Activities to Meet Measurable Goals and Objectives for Drug and Violence Prevention

A large proportion of districts lack measurable goals and objectives.

A large proportion of districts lack measurable goals and objectives (i.e., goals and objectives that are sufficiently well-specified to permit assessment of the extent to which they are achieved). See Chapter 2. Based on the main sample of districts, only half have any measurable goals or objectives in place. For example, 52 percent have an outcome goal or objective that specifies the extent to which abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs by students would be reduced. Only 25 percent of districts have process goals and objectives that specify a minimum number of hours of drug prevention. Based on the subsample of districts, an even smaller proportion of districts may have measurable goals and objectives than the proportion based on the main sample.

6.4 Principle 3: Design and Implement Activities Based on Research or Evaluation that Provides Evidence that the Strategies Used to Prevent or Reduce Drug Use, Violence, or Disruptive Behavior Among Youth

Few districts are using research-based prevention activities.

Few districts are using research-based prevention activities. See Chapter 2. Although the majority of districts reviewed research on the effectiveness of potential programs, less than 10 percent of districts were implementing drug prevention activities that have been demonstrated to be effective. The findings were similar for violence prevention activities.

6.5 Principle 4: Evaluate Programs Periodically to Assess Progress Toward Achieving the Goals and Objectives; and Use the Evaluation Results to Refine, Improve, and Strengthen the Program, and Refine Goals and Objectives, as Appropriate

Many districts appear to be on the right path to meeting the fourth principle. See Chapter 5. For example, 72 percent of districts used results from their evaluation of prevention efforts to measure progress towards goals and objectives, and many districts used these results to modify programs. However, district evaluations will be most useful if they are based on measurable goals and objectives and on high-quality information. As mentioned, these areas need improvement.

Many districts appear to be on the right path to meeting principle 4. For example, 72 percent of districts used results from their evaluation of prevention efforts to measure progress towards goals and objectives, and many districts used these results to modify programs.

6.6 Technical Assistance and Resources

We should avoid being critical of district progress in implementing the Principles of Effectiveness as they took effect after the 1997-98 school year, which is the reference period for the study. However, since 1994, the SDFSCA Program, as reauthorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), has required some of the same processes that are now mandated by the Principles. A primary aim of the ESEA was to provide recipients of funds with increased flexibility to design and implement programs that meet local needs and support education reform strategies. The greater flexibility was to be matched by greater accountability for achieving measurable results. The revised statutory provisions of the SDFSCA State and Local Grants Program reflect this policy. Specifically, the reauthorization sought to increase accountability for program funds by requiring:

- Local needs assessments using objective data;
- Establishment of measurable goals and objectives for SDFSCA programs at the state and local levels; and
- Implementation of procedures to assess progress toward meeting these goals and objectives.

The data indicate that school districts are greatly in need of assistance to implement the Principles. Areas of need include (a) crafting measurable goals and objectives, (b) linking goals and objectives to efforts, (c) gathering objective data about drug and violence problems, (d) choosing

The data indicate that school districts are greatly in need of assistance to implement the Principles.

research-based strategies, and e) evaluating progress towards meeting their goals and objectives. Given that so few districts reported receiving guidance in these areas and so many would like guidance, we strongly suggest that SEAs and ED improve and expand technical assistance to school districts. This should take the form of effectively disseminating information and conducting training on the areas that are most problematic.

Clearly, another important issue is the availability of resources for implementing the Principles. For many smaller districts, the SDFSCA allocation alone is inadequate for them to meet the standards established by the Principles. These districts already are having trouble stretching their prevention budgets. Unless they dramatically shift resources away from direct prevention activities for students or receive additional funding, such districts will be unable to afford activities that include evaluating progress towards goals and objectives. SEAs, ED, and Congress may wish to consider whether or not all districts should be expected to make further progress in implementing the Principles of Effectiveness without providing additional SDFSCA resources.

For many smaller districts, the SDFSCA allocation alone is inadequate for them to meet the standards established by the Principles.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for the National Study of Local Education Agency Activities under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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